

# KENTUCKY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## MUSEUM THEATRE GUIDE

### WHO'D THUNK IT?: INVENTING KENTUCKY HISTORY

#### OVERVIEW

Eyewitness to History performances bring exhibit themes to life through dramatic presentations based on the lives of Kentuckians from all walks of life. In *Who'd Thunk It?* a wacky inventor explores the inventive process while telling how the work of Kentucky inventors changed everyday life. Created by museum theatre assistant Greg Hardison, the seventeen-minute-long performance brings history to life with sound, comedy, and even a little magic! A museum staff member is on hand to introduce the play and conduct a discussion after it ends.

#### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

##### Topics

- Inventors
- Technological change

##### Core Content Connections

- Historical Perspective: Historical events have multiple causes (SS-E-5.1.3/SS-M-5.1.3)
- Historical Perspective: The way we live has changed over time for both Kentuckians and Americans because of changes in many areas (SS-E-5.2.3)

#### BACKGROUND

##### History

Kentucky inventors have created a variety of innovations—from technological improvements to food products. Some have gone down in history, and others have been forgotten. The inventors recognized in *Who'd Thunk It?* include:

- Charles P. Ball, the Danville native who in 1879 patented an improved vaporizer
- John Bibb, the Frankfort legislator and horticulturalist who created Bibb lettuce in 1854
- Joel Cheek, the Burkesville man who in 1892 created the blend for Maxwell House coffee

- Thomas Edison, who worked in Louisville in 1867 and showed off his incandescent light bulbs at the 1883 Southern Exposition
- John Fitch, who designed a steam-powered paddle wheeler in the 1780s and made money by selling maps of Kentucky that he drew
- Margaret and John Kaelin, owners of Kaelin's Restaurant in Louisville and inventors of the cheeseburger in 1934
- Garrett Morgan, an African American inventor from Paris, Kentucky, who patented the gas mask in 1914 and the tricolor electric stoplight in 1923
- Matthew Sellers, an early flight pioneer who successfully flew his quadroplane (four-winged plane) in 1908
- Nathan Stubblefield, a Murray inventor who in 1902 was the first to transmit and receive radio airwaves
- Thomas Tobin, a professor at Central University (now Eastern Kentucky University) who is credited with inventing illusions using mirrors

##### Plot

*Who'd Thunk It?* is a theatrical lecture that tells a series of stories about inventors and inventions. The narrator weaves these anecdotes together in his endeavor to define the inventive process.

##### Character

The piece is performed by one actor who plays a wacky inventor telling the stories of the inventors and contemplates the inventive process and its ups and downs.

##### Setting and costumes

As a theatrical lecture, *Who'd Thunk It?* does not have a specific setting. It is performed in the *Kentucky Journey* exhibit beside the Southern Exposition setting, which features the kinds of innovations that were displayed in that Louisville event in the 1880s. The actor wears a lab coat and colorful "thinking cap" that symbolizes the spirit of invention. His main prop is a multipurpose machine that illustrates key components of the inventions the play celebrates.

### *Script and performance style*

KHS museum theatre assistant and actor Greg Hardison researched and wrote the script. It is in the form of a dramatic monologue, with the actor addressing the audience throughout the play.

## IN THE MUSEUM

When they arrive in the performance area, students will be asked to sit on the floor. (Limited seating is available for students with special needs and adults.) A museum staff member will provide a brief introduction to the play. After the performance, the actor will come out of character to participate in a follow-up discussion with the audience.

We rely on teachers and chaperones to make sure students behave well during performances, and we reserve the right to ask disruptive students or classes to leave.

### AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

- Show respect for the performers and other museum guests by not talking.
- Do not use recording devices, cameras, or laser-pointers during the performance.
- Do not touch or talk with performers unless instructed or encouraged to do so.

## GLOSSARY

**Invent**—To think up and create something new

**Invention**—A new thing or way of doing something developed through study and experimentation. Synonyms for invention used in the play include contraption, doohickey, gadget, thingamajig, and whatchamacallit.

**Inventor**—One who creates something new by using his or her ingenuity or imagination

**Patent**—A legal document giving an inventor the sole right to make, use, and/or sell his or her invention

**Spontaneous**—1. Happening without an apparent external cause; 2. Arising from a natural inclination or impulse and not from an external force

## RESOURCES

*Inventing Modern America: From the Microwave to the Mouse*—A Web site that profiles 35 inventors and the qualities that helped them to succeed. Includes interactive games that explore the nature of invention.  
<http://web.mit.edu/invent/www/ima/>

*Inventors and Innovation*—Selected links to the Web site of the Smithsonian Institution  
<http://www.si.edu/resource/faq/nmah/invent.htm>

*The Kids' Invention Book*—A look at eleven young inventors, ideas on how to get started, and information on how to get a patent and enter invention contests.

*The Lemelson Center*—A Web site of the invention center at the National Museum of American History. Includes virtual exhibits and links to resources about the history of invention.  
<http://www.si.edu/lemelson>

*United States Patent and Trademark Office Kids Pages*—Includes information, events, games, puzzles, and links  
<http://www.uspto.gov/go/kids/>

*Zoom Inventors and Inventions*—A virtual encyclopedia about innovations and the people who developed them, from prehistoric times to 2000  
<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/inventors/>

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